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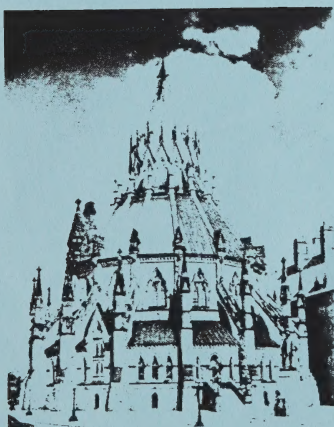
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TELEVISION AND CULTURE:
THE QUEST FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY

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October 7, 1985



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Cat. No. YM32-2/136E

ISBN 0-660-12406-8



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TELEVISION AND CULTURE: THE QUEST FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY*

INTRODUCTION

Consider two platitudes:

- (1) "Culture is the soul of a nation,"
- (2) "Canadian culture is good for Canadians."

When these platitudes are combined with facts such as that 75% of the television viewed by Canadians comes from the United States or that the most popular show in Canada is Dallas, the result is often a plea for a more nationalistic approach to television policy in Canada. Suggested policies include higher (or more strictly enforced) Canadian content requirements, especially for drama in prime time; restrictions on American programs available in Canada; and the expansion of Canadian networks to make them effective competitors in the Canadian market.

This paper argues that platitudes do not provide a basis for policy and that the suggested policies, when closely examined, bear little relation to the platitudes used to support them. Suggestions for Canada to compete with America in supplying mass entertainment confuse art and entertainment and ignore the economics of television program production. There are three main sections to the paper. The first examines the American presence on Canadian television, the second the different meanings given to the term "culture" in discussions of television policy and the third the specific policies suggested to promote Canadian culture.

* This is a revised version of a paper presented at the Canada Council's Arts Research Seminar No.3 (Television and Touring) on June 7, 1985.

Although the focus is on Canadian television, the analysis is relevant for any nation that is worried about the national content of its television.⁽¹⁾ Such worries are real. Dallas is now seen in 91 countries, and recent advances in technology have increased the areas covered by satellite transmissions and lowered the cost of receiver dishes. Europeans now speak despairingly of the "Canadianization" of their television systems, so it is interesting and important to probe the relationships that do exist between American and Canadian television.

THE AMERICAN PRESENCE ON CANADIAN TELEVISION

A. Some Facts

The view that American shows dominate Canadian television is based on solid evidence. According to analysis by the Alliance for Canadian Broadcasting (ACB), three-quarters of available programming in Canada is American. The ACB has collected a number of facts about this American dominance:

- Only 28 per cent of all English language television available in Canada is Canadian. Twenty-eight per cent - and that's adding up every program, of every station, from sign-on till sign-off.
- In Prime Time (7-11 P.M.), only 23 percent of all programs available on Canadian screens are Canadian.
- In major centres, the ratios are even worse.
 - Toronto, our largest city: only 20 per cent of prime time TV is Canadian.

(1) See Kaarle Nordengstreng and Herbert I. Schiller (eds.), National Sovereignty and International Communication, Norwood, N.J.: Abbex Publishing Corporation, 1979 for a collection of essays that reflects such worries.

- Vancouver, our third largest, only 20 per cent
Canadian in prime time.⁽¹⁾

In drama, which on television includes action shows and situation comedies, American dominance is even more striking. As the ACB put it: "For every hour of Canadian drama on Canadian TV and cable, there are twenty-four hours of American drama."⁽²⁾ Although the Americanization of news - as when a Canadian announcer introduces news reports from ABC, NBC or CBS - is also a worry to Canadian nationalists,⁽³⁾ the major concern has been the total dominance of American drama on Canadian television. Table 1 provides a distribution of viewing time by type of program and origin of program. Although the information in this Table is dated, the general patterns probably still hold. What is important is that most Canadians use television as a source of entertainment, and most of the entertainment - what has previously been called "drama" - comes from outside Canada. Moreover, television viewing occupies half the leisure time of the average Canadian, and by the age of 12 the average Canadian child will have spent more time in front of a TV than in school,⁽⁴⁾ so the threat of American cultural dominance seems ominous.

How ominous the threat is, in fact, depends on the meaning one gives to the word "culture". Much of this paper argues that the statements "We should support Canadian culture on television" and "We should worry about American culture on Canadian television" contain two different meanings for the word "culture". The differences must be brought out if one

(1) Alliance for Canadian Broadcasting, "What Happened to Canadian Television" in the The Airwaves Belong to the Canadian People, Toronto: ACB, n.d. (?1985), p. 2. Emphasis in original.

(2) ACB, Airwaves, p. 3. Emphasis in original.

(3) Mark Starowicz, "Slow Dissolve: How Canada Will Lose Its Broadcasting Sovereignty," Address to Graduate Programme in Communications Studies of the University of Calgary, November 27, 1984. This speech voices his concern about the Americanization of both drama and news.

(4) ACB, Airwaves, p. 2.

is to make sense of the debate about a national television system. First, however, it is useful to see how American television occupies such a large place in the viewing habits of Canadians.

Table 1

Viewing Time of English Television in Canada (% of total)						
Type	1967 Origin		Total	1978 Origin		Total
	Canadian	Foreign		Canadian	Foreign	
News	7.57	1.18	8.75	13.16	1.09	14.25
Current Affairs	4.88	0.32	5.20	1.93	0.49	2.43
Information	0.07	0.00	0.07	1.05	0.11	1.16
Sports	6.47	0.20	6.68	5.47	1.14	6.61
Entertainment	9.60	68.78	78.38	8.72	66.18	74.90
Other	0.48	0.44	0.92	0.20	0.46	0.66
Total	29.07	70.03	100.00	30.53	69.47	100.00

Source: Paul Audley, Canada's Cultural Industries, Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1983, p. 258.

B. American Television Networks Seen in Canada

Canada has long been recognized as a country dominated by its geography. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the area of television. The technology of broadcasting means that many Canadians who live near the U.S. - and most of Canada's population, of course, lives in the hundred mile strip along the border - can receive over-the-air signals from the U.S. Reception is not perfect except in a handful of cities right on the border, although antennas can be used to improve it. The addition of the American networks on cable in Canada and advances in satellite technology mean that most Canadians now have direct access to the American networks - networks

that are not regulated by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). Even without cable and satellites, many Canadians would have access to American television,⁽¹⁾ so it is not possible to eliminate the American presence by regulating the new communications technology.⁽²⁾

The U.S. television system is, in part, also a function of that country's geography. With a large, dispersed population, the U.S. developed powerful networks as the foundation of its television system. There are other reasons for the dominance of the networks, including economies of scale and the possibility that regulations set down by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to limit the power of the networks actually protected the major networks from competition.⁽³⁾ Whatever the reasons for their dominance, ABC, CBS and NBC are the major players in American television; another notable player is PBS, the Public Broadcasting Service. Together, these make up what is often referred to as the "3+1" or the basic package of American television signals.⁽⁴⁾

From a business standpoint, television stations sell viewers to advertisers. Programs, which are expensive to produce, are free to viewers; the more popular the show is, of course, the more viewers are attracted and the more valuable the show becomes to advertisers. Networks act as middlemen, buying shows from independent program suppliers and "selling" the shows to local outlets (the "selling" price consists of a

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- (1) Without American networks on cable it is possible that more Canadian homes would have large antennas or that new communities would be built with consideration to the quality of reception of U.S. television.
 - (2) The example of satellite dishes, moreover, shows that it is difficult to regulate technological advances.
 - (3) Stanley M. Besen, et al., Misregulating Television: Network Dominance and the FCC, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
 - (4) This paper concentrates on the American over-the-air broadcasters. Cable and satellites are expanding television choice in the U.S., and, as was seen in the case of the specialty services introduced to Canada in 1984, there is pressure to bring the expanded choice to Canada.

portion of the advertising time associated with the show).(1) It has been estimated that each of the three major networks spends about \$1.5 billion (U.S.) on programming each year;(2) the value of advertising for each network is, of course, greater than the amount spent on programming.

With some minor exceptions, the value of programming to U.S. networks does not include any return from the Canadian audience for that programming. Some U.S. border stations may sell advertising to Canadian firms, although this source of revenue was sharply reduced in 1976 when Bill C-58 disallowed tax deductions for Canadian advertising on U.S. stations. An advertising market such as Windsor-Detroit may be treated as a single market for the pricing of programs by a U.S. station, but this is unusual. In general, the Canadian market is neglected in the operations of the U.S. television system.

That U.S. signals are a free good in Canada is a sore point with the U.S. networks. Especially irksome is the retransmission of U.S. signals by Canadian cable systems that made no payments to the U.S. networks. The area of retransmission rights is one of the most controversial areas in the current discussions of the revision of copyright in Canada.(3) The U.S. networks often press a moral claim for remuneration - creators are not receiving payment for what they created - but no U.S. network would agree to any regulation by the CRTC or Canadian courts.

C. American Programs Seen on Canadian Stations

American television shows are seen in Canada not only on the American networks but also on Canadian stations. The showing of U.S.

(1) Besen, et al. (1984), p. 50, 165-166.

(2) "Wide World of Programming", Broadcasting, October 22, 1984, p. 71.

(3) Canada, From Gutenberg to Telidon: A White Paper on Copyright, Ottawa: Supply and Services, 1984, p. 89-112.

programs by Canadian stations is particularly irritating to those who worry about Canadian culture on television. As Mark Starowicz put it:

[E]very time the CRTC gives a licence to a Canadian applicant, the applicant receives a licence to import hours of American programming into the market.

To draw a parallel, we are not manufacturing cars in this country. We are distributing, via a federal agency, dealerships. The licence to import Hondas. In fact, we have protected our auto industry better, because we negotiated the Auto Pact...We have made a holy fuss about foreign orchestra conductors or British theatre directors, then rushed to outbid each other in Hollywood for the broadcast rights of Dallas or Dynasty.(1)

One estimate suggests that two-thirds of the programming carried by the three U.S. networks is purchased by Canadian stations.(2) There is an obvious explanation for this - Canadian stations are able to buy the broadcast rights to American television shows at a fraction of the cost of producing those shows themselves. Given the cost of television programming - a point to be discussed in more detail below - no Canadian station or network can hope to match the spending of the U.S. networks.

A related point raised by some commentators on Canadian television is that American shows are "dumped" on the Canadian market.(3) Dumping in the technical sense as applied to merchandise trade has two requirements. The first is sale of a "like product" at a price below "fair market value," and the second is injury to local industry producing the "like product". It is possible to argue according to these requirements that American shows are not dumped. The shows are sold to Canadian stations by competitive bidding; critics of the process have argued that this process has driven prices up. Without massive subsidies, moreover, Canadian

(1) Starowicz (1984), p. 9.

(2) Audley (1983), p. 314.

(3) Joyce Nelson, "Global Pillage: The Economics of Commercial Television," in David Helwig (ed.), Love and Money: The Politics of Culture, Toronto: Oberon Press, 1980, p. 14-31. Audley (1983), p. 255.

television producers would not be able to duplicate the American programming. The dumping of services is a very tricky subject because it is difficult to define like products - is the King of Kensington show, for example, equivalent to the Bill Cosby Show? That UNESCO agreements provide for cultural products to be treated differently from ordinary trade items handled under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) also clouds the question of the dumping of television shows.⁽¹⁾

The previous subsection pointed out that the American networks were upset because Canadians could watch American programming with no copyright payment to the originating station. In fact, however, most American programming seen in Canada has direct or indirect copyright payment. When a Canadian station pays for an American show there is, of course, direct payment. Since 1976 the CRTC has provided for "simultaneous substitution". This means that if a Canadian station has purchased the rights to an American show, the Canadian broadcast - the show and supporting commercials sold by the Canadian station - will be substituted for any retransmission of an American broadcast of the same show at the same time in the Canadian station's market. The substitution raises the value of the American show to the Canadian station, because the advertising on the Canadian station is not diluted by American advertising for the same show. As Canadians bid up the price of American shows - and there was a large increase between 1976 and 1977⁽²⁾ - the producers of the American shows are receiving indirect payment for American network shows seen in Canada.

CULTURE AND TELEVISION

The problem with using the word "culture" is that it has many meanings. Obviously, debate will never be resolved if participants do not at least agree about definitions. This section looks at several elements

(1) It should always be kept in mind that anti-dumping regulations are not meant to offset comparative advantage in international trade but to deal with disruptive exports that are "unfairly" priced or injurious to local producers.

(2) Nelson (1980), p. 16.

that should be included when trying to pin down a definition of culture to use in discussions of television policy. A good starting point is the examination of the range of meanings attached to the word culture. If all the meanings of culture are ranked from "high culture" (the arts) to "low culture" (mass entertainment), it will be seen that the platitudes generally relate to the first while the proposed policies generally relate to the second. (The terms "high" and "low" are, of course, imprecise and the dividing line between them is a matter of personal choice. This distinction, occasionally made in the study of cultural economics -- with the ingenuous qualification that no value judgment is implied -- is useful when discussing television policy.)

A. Entertainment or Art

The distinction between entertainment and art should be kept in mind when the word culture is used loosely. An example from the time of Shakespeare may sharpen the distinction. In the narrow, artistic sense culture then might have consisted of attending a performance of Macbeth; in the broad sense of entertainment, culture would have included the theatre as well as such diverse pastimes as falconry, fishing, duelling, bearbaiting, cockfighting and dancing. As one expert has written:

In Shakespeare's time promoters of public amusement seem to have placed the attractions of bullbaiting and bearbaiting on much the same level as dramatic performances.⁽¹⁾

Bearbaiting, for those who wonder, consists of setting loose packs of mastiff dogs upon a bear that has been chained to a post. From several references to bearbaiting in Shakespeare's plays, we know that it was violent and noisy and extremely popular - similar, in fact, to popular television today.

(1) Sir Sidney Lee, "Bearbaiting, Bullbaiting, and Cockfighting," in Shakespeare's England: An Account of the Life and Manners of His Age, Vol. II, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926, p. 429.

It should be kept in mind, moreover, that theatre in the age of Shakespeare was not entirely high art. There are innumerable scenes and passages in the plays of Shakespeare to remind us that the theatre could be violent and coarse. Many plays by now forgotten writers were undoubtedly as violent as any play by Shakespeare and considerably less poetic. Although no one in Shakespeare's time referred to the theatre as a "vast wasteland," there were constant attempts to control, censor or ban it. If there had been a fund to subsidize "theatre" then, the result might have been a flood of coarse, violent plays; if the fund had been used to subsidize "culture" - loosely defined - the result might have been more bearbaiting.

It is easy, perhaps too easy, to be smug about television, to call it a vast wasteland or even compare it with Elizabethan bearbaiting. This overlooks the essence of commercial television - it is successful, inexpensive mass entertainment. Millions choose to watch shows that critics argue are inane, or worse. Here, there is a double confusion between entertainment and art and between entertainment and education. What the three American networks provide is entertainment.⁽¹⁾ To compete against the American networks is to compete in the provision of entertainment. If instead of culture or drama on television we spoke of entertainment, discussions about television policy might be less emotional.

B. Culture and National Identity

Ephemeral works do not shape a national identity. Only lasting works can do that, and popularity or mass appeal is no guarantee that a work will last. The musical compositions of Salieri were more popular during his lifetime than those of Mozart. If it were not for a recent play and film, of course, Salieri would be forgotten. Geniuses and works of art are remembered. Shakespeare in England, Wagner in Germany, Molière in France are national treasures. It is difficult to argue that I Love Lucy or Leave it to Beaver should be a national treasure in the U.S.

(1) This neglects the news and information dimensions of television, which are certainly important. The emphasis on entertainment, however, pulls the discussion away from platitudes that are more correctly linked to art.

Culture may be the soul of a nation, but it is culture in the sense of art not in the sense of mass entertainment. Paradoxically, the work of Shakespeare, Wagner and Molière, which is treated as a national treasure by their native countries, is recognized as art because of its universal appeal. True, Shakespeare wrote historical plays, but his greatness and the source of his universal appeal extended beyond England to Italy and Egypt and places that belonged more to his mind than to a map. His historical plays, moreover, often overstepped scrupulous history. Nevertheless, Shakespeare has helped to define what it means to be English.

A flippant response to the above is that all Canada needs to do is produce a Shakespeare who writes for television. Even a lesser artist writing for Canadian television would do. Here, we come to serious proposals that Canada must nourish television scriptwriters by underwriting Canadian television drama. Mark Starowicz looks at the results of not following such a policy: "In our failure to produce enough drama, we are not only mortgaging our culture, but assuring that a generation of writers and performers is culturally stillborn."⁽¹⁾ If Starowicz had written of entertainment instead of drama, the argument would be less emotional. The market does an excellent job of providing mass entertainment, although the process may not create artists or lasting works of art.

C. High Culture on Television

If a nation's identity is shaped by its art or what is imprecisely called high culture, it is important to examine the existing place of high culture on television. Since television's earliest days there have been periodic waves of optimism about the possible role of television in promoting the arts.⁽²⁾ These optimistic dreams have yet to come true. Conventional television remains devoted to mass entertainment. The Public Broadcasting Service, which has tried to carve a niche for the arts in conventional broadcasting, appeals to only a small portion of television viewers.

(1) Starowicz (1984), p. 31.

(2) There have also been waves of optimism about the use of television in improving education. The optimism in this area has changed to worry about the adverse effects of television on literacy.

The most recent wave of optimism was associated with the rise of cable television in the U.S. The cable, or "narrowcasting", system was to be similar to a newstand where specialty magazines could be purchased. The audience for the arts is small by comparison to the audiences for major network shows, but advocates of culture on cable believed there were enough potential viewers to support the production and transmission of specialty programs of ballet, opera and drama. That was the theory. In practice, cable stations devoted to the arts have not been successful and there have been failures and mergers.

In Canada, C Channel, the Pay TV station devoted to the arts, failed soon after it began operations. At its peak, C Channel had about 27,000 subscribers; of these subscribers, moreover, only 4,200 received C Channel alone, the others subscribing to it as part of a package with one or more of the available Pay TV stations. There were many reasons for the failure of C Channel. Its price was too high (\$15.95 plus sales tax per month) and there were several low cost alternatives.⁽¹⁾

In the U.S., the arts cable stations have also faced rocky times. Audiences have not been large enough to attract advertisers to guarantee the financial health of these stations. Moreover, advertisers were not sure of the type of audience the shows were attracting but did know that these audiences were not large. This has led to constant pressure for more viewers, so the entertainment aspect of programming is becoming more important than the arts aspect.⁽²⁾

The experience in Canada and the U.S. has not extinguished all hope for the future of the arts on television. The marketing of the arts channels might improve with more information on the composition of the audience for these channels. Technological advances that make possible pay-per-program television may lead to pay television that is closer to the image of a newstand. There may be an audience for ballet once a month, and

(1) Terrence J. Thomas, "The Failure of Culture on Pay TV," paper presented to the Third International Conference on Cultural Economics and Planning, Akron, Ohio, April 1984.

(2) David Samuels, "Keeping Culture on Cable," Journal of Arts Management and Law, Vol. 13, no. 4 (Winter 1984), p. 55-73.

the pay-per-program technology may allow a producer of televised ballet to tap this audience to finance the program. Only time will tell if this optimism is warranted.

At the moment, the only definite conclusion is that the audience for high culture on television is very small. This does not mean that the quality of the shows on PBS or the cable arts channels is not high. There is excellent television available, and the standards should be maintained. But these shows will never compete with the mass entertainment on the major networks. It is interesting that the arts on television tend to be adaptations of some other art form (literature, drama, opera, ballet). Mass entertainment in films or on television is generally unattached to any art form.

D. The Production of Culture

Economics has a valuable role to play in discussions of culture.⁽¹⁾ Too often, assertions are made about market failure in the provision of culture or about the need for government subsidies to the arts. These assertions may be true, but emotional arguments that are vague or platitudinous do not prove them. Thinking in terms of supply and demand and market organization forces one to ask specific questions. What exactly is being demanded or supplied? What are the relevant prices and costs? Will changing prices and incomes by government policy change the quantity of culture demanded or supplied?

The phrase the "quantity of culture" in the last question exposes a few problems. For a start, of course, it is too vague. If rephrased to ask about the quantity of books or television shows, the question becomes manageable. If, however, we are asking about culture as an expression of national identity, we will not find the answer in the analysis of the supply and demand of books or television shows. Economics can discuss cultural products, but not the production of culture.

(1) See Steven Globerman, Cultural Regulation in Canada, Montreal: The Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1983 and Terrence J. Thomas, "Economics and Culture, "Mini-Review 84-18E, Ottawa: Library of Parliament, May 22, 1984 for samples of the economic approach to culture.

A similar point is that economists do not know the influence of the supply of related goods on the supply of culture. In this paper the concern is: Will an increase in the supply of American television shows decrease supplies of the source of Canadian culture (that is, Canadian books, films, drama)? The answer is that economists do not know. Neither, unfortunately, does anyone else in Canada.

E. Culture on American Television

Canadian culture, at least English Canadian culture, is always discussed with reference to American culture. Canadians feel frustration that Europeans seem to find them indistinguishable from Americans. Canadians want to be different. The desire to promote national identity is a desire to identify and strengthen the differences between Canadians and Americans. The drive for Canadian national identity also includes some muted anti-Americanism and some related frustrations. America's population is ten times that of Canada and has at least ten times the economic clout. One Canadian Prime Minister compared living next to the United States to sleeping with an elephant.

There are, however, important differences between Canada and the United States. The American political scientist Seymour Martin Lipset has studied the two countries for over 20 years and can list many differences:

- historical background
- self-definition
- literature and myths
- religion and values
- attitudes to law and deviance
- economics - reliance on public v. private sector
- elitism and equalitarianism
- mosaic v. melting pot view of society.

A recent paper by Lipset that discusses these differences in detail, however, begins by pointing out that "these two people probably resemble each other more than any other two nations on earth."⁽¹⁾

(1) Seymour Martin Lipset, "Canada and the United States: The Cultural Dimension" in Charles F. Doran and John H. Sigler (eds.), Canada and the United States: Enduring Friendship, Persistent Stress, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1985, p. 109. The quotation is taken by Lipset from one of his earlier papers.

If Canadians worry about American cultural dominance on television, it is useful to look at the cultural implications of American television to Americans. The arts on American television are still a minority taste and can be neglected. When it comes to conventional television, many Americans have the same worries about mass entertainment as many Canadians. They worry about sex and violence and the portrayal of minorities on television and their influence on children, especially with respect to literacy. If television destroys literacy, they suggest, the appreciation of America's literary heritage will atrophy.

What Americans do not seem to worry about is the regional dominance of American television by the two coasts. The East Coast (New York) dominates the production of soap operas and news, while the West Coast (Los Angeles) dominates the production of general entertainment. The viewer in the Midwest or the South is bombarded by an alien culture that includes stereotypes of Midwesterners and Southerners.

There are several possible reasons why there has not been a drive for regional programming in the U.S. The first and most important reason has to do with economics and economies of scale in television programming - the regions cannot afford to set up independent networks.⁽¹⁾ Second might be the view that America is indeed a melting pot, that East Coast and West Coast and Midwestern cultures will eventually merge. The counter argument is that there are striking differences between regions in the U.S., differences that remain after 30 years of homogeneous television. A third reason is that the regions do not feel threatened by homogeneous mass entertainment. The South, for example, maintains its regional culture through its impressive literature. The Dukes of Hazzard apparently does not bother a society that can produce writers like Faulkner, O'Connor and Capote. There is an important lesson here for Canada.

(1) Although there are also FCC regulations that prevent the entry of new networks to the American television system, economies of scale are probably more important as a barrier to entry. The economics of competing with the major U.S. networks will be taken up below.

SUGGESTED TELEVISION POLICIES FOR CANADA

This paper examines three possible ways to make Canadian television less American. The first is an extreme policy of total prohibition. Though this is seldom recommended in such a stark form and is probably a political non-starter, it is nevertheless, useful to look at its feasibility. The second consists of Canadian content requirements and is the policy currently in use. The third possible way is the strengthening of Canadian stations - especially the CBC - to provide head-to-head competition with the American networks for Canadian viewers.

A. Prohibition of American Television in Canada

Technically and politically, it would be impossible to eliminate American television from Canada. Most advocates of nationalistic television in Canada are careful to point that they oppose electronic Berlin Walls and that the current flow of American programming is not reversible for political reasons⁽¹⁾ - that is, Canadians will not give up television that they enjoy watching. At the same time, these advocates give the impression that Canada would be much better off without American television shows, either from American networks or from Canadian stations. In fact, Canada would be measurably worse off. The replacements for the American shows would be of poorer quality or would cost more than the American shows.

As mentioned, complete prohibition is not politically feasible. But what would happen if such a policy were tried? Without jamming devices aimed at the U.S., many Canadians would be able to pick up over-the-air broadcasts from American networks. Subscriptions to cable would undoubtedly fall off, and the money saved used to purchase large antennas or satellite dishes. Fewer Canadians would be able to watch American television than do now, but enough would have access to prod the have-nots to political action to regain their viewing rights.

(1) Starowicz (1984), p. 23, 36.

What would be the effect on Canadian programming of an attempted prohibition? There would probably be little change. The production costs of American shows are so great that Canadian producers would not be able to duplicate them. The market in Canada is simply too small for advertising revenue to cover production costs. Without a large increase in government funding - an option analyzed below - the quality of shows on Canadian television would suffer.

B. Canadian Content Requirements

The 1958 Broadcasting Act called for a national broadcasting system, "Canadian in content and character", by 1968; the description was to apply only to the CBC.⁽¹⁾ The CRTC still sets Canadian content requirements for Canadian broadcasters - a given proportion of programming must be made by Canadians - but the notion of Canadian character has slipped away. This is because it is infinitely easier to monitor the former than the latter.

In economic terms, Canadian content requirements regulate inputs, Canadian character requirements would regulate output. All the platitudes dealing with culture and national identity are geared to output. There is no necessary relationship between Canadian inputs to a show - producer, director, writer, actors, head of art department, director of photography, editor - and an output with Canadian character. The experience of the Canadian film industry demonstrates this. Films have been made whose input qualified them as Canadian films but which were clones of American films - to the point where the Canadian character of the film was non-existent.

In April 1984, the CRTC released new criteria for the definition of a Canadian program. A points system ensures that key creative functions are filled by Canadians and expenditure requirements ensure that most of the technical work and processing and final preparation are done by Canadians. In an effort to promote prime time drama, the CRTC offers 150% time credit for a Canadian program scheduled for between 7 and 10 p.m.

(1) Audley (1983), p. 254.

Changing the criteria for Canadian programs and giving extra credit for prime time drama may give the appearance of greater concern for Canadian culture, but the new CRTC requirements still focus on inputs. Canadian television stations will continue to meet their content requirements in the least expensive way possible.⁽¹⁾ Given the relative costs of purchasing the rights to an American show and producing a Canadian show, the content regulations are a financial burden on the Canadian stations (or, in the case of CBC, on Canadian taxpayers).

The financial burden borne by stations or taxpayers might also be considered a transfer of income to special interest groups. In this respect, cultural regulation is no different from other types of government regulation. The television production industry, broadly defined to include independent actors, writers and others who see themselves taking part in any increase in television work, pushes the government to increase Canadian content requirements and thus production in Canada. Canadian content regulations can be seen as an industrial policy wrapped up in platitudes about culture and national identity.

Creative groups, of course, are not the only ones to cloak special interest economic proposals in platitudes; no organization asks for government regulation - an advantage over competitors or an outright subsidy - without a list of noble reasons for the regulation. This is not, however, a defence of the practice. Governments should always look beyond platitudes to the probable effects of specific policies. This paper has argued that this vigilance is especially warranted in the area of television and culture.

It would not be easy, moreover, to change Canadian content from emphasis on inputs to emphasis on output. Anyone who thinks the switch is manageable should try to define Canadian output. One occasionally hears that Canadians want to see Canadian settings for their television shows and

(1) Expense here is a net concept that includes advertising revenue. If an action show cost twice as much as a game show but is worth more than twice as much to advertisers, it may be less expensive for the station to air the action show.

films.⁽¹⁾ But would setting the typical American television show in a Canadian city - changing, say, Miami Vice to Vancouver Vice - establish Canadian identity? If the setting and characters were Canadian, would the show be Canadian? This seems promising, but do we really think of Hamlet as a Danish play? It has often been suggested that there should be more Canadian historical drama on TV. There have been good Canadian shows that reflected Canada's past. The problem is that there is a limit to these in terms of market and possibly in the availability of good scripts. Moreover, historical drama is often poor, or distorted, history.

The difficulty of defining Canadian output does not mean that it does not exist. It is possible that shows with Canadian settings and characters will indeed help shape a national identity, as might an imaginative production of King Lear performed at Stratford, Ontario and televised in Canada. This returns to the assertion made in the first section of this paper that it is works of art - enduring works with universal appeal - that shape national identity. Simple, national content rules will not produce such works of art.⁽²⁾

C. Expanded Canadian Television

Discussions of cultural policy generally lead to discussions of money - how little is available for such a policy; how much more is needed. The typical discussion of culture and television policy is no different; only the sums of money involved are staggering. The expenditure of large funds is easily rationalized - Canada is being culturally dominated by American networks with vast financial resources, so Canadians must defend

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- (1) The converse is that Canadians are annoyed when Canadian cities are altered, with streets and buildings renamed, for use in an American film or TV show.
 - (2) Some might argue that Canadian content requirements provide the possibility for Canadians to produce art on television. The content requirements are very expensive. Given that funding for all culture is limited, the channelling of funds to television may divert funds from literature and theatre.

their culture with adequate sums of money. In other words, a Canadian public network should go head-to-head with the major American networks.⁽¹⁾

As pointed out above, each of the three American networks is reported to spend \$1.5 billion (U.S.) each year on programming. That is over \$2 billion in Canadian dollars, or more than nine times the public funding (\$218 million) that went into the English CBC television network.⁽²⁾ At one point in his paper calling for Canada to regain its broadcasting sovereignty, Mark Starowicz suggests that the American invasion could have been countered by having the CRTC call for, and the government fund, a public network with two or three channels.⁽³⁾

Assume that expanded Canadian television means having a public network the size of one of the U.S. majors. How should the needed \$2 billion dollars be raised? Until recently, the government could have issued bonds and increased the deficit by \$2 billion. Now, in a new period of fiscal restraint, the money would have to come from cutbacks in other programs or increases in taxes.

Mark Starowicz suggests a number of taxes.⁽⁴⁾ One is a tax on cable subscribers who benefit from receiving the American networks (the "3+1") as part of the basic cable package. Another is a tax on "TV sets, VCR's, antennas, satellite dishes, coaxil cable and other TV equipment;" this tax has almost an Old Testament appeal - the equipment that imports American programming shall be punished. Unfortunately, the taxes suggested would have to be inordinately high to raise the necessary funds. With 5.4 million cable subscribers in Canada, the tax would have to be set at \$370 per year for each subscriber. This would imply a quadrupling of the

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- (1) The Canadian private networks would not have the financial power to enter such a battle.
- (2) Starowicz (1984), p. 25.
- (3) Ibid., p. 13.
- (4) Ibid., p. 13, 27.

average cable fee to raise \$2 billion, and this assumes, quite unrealistically, that none of the current subscribers would give up cable. There are about half as many VCR owners as cable subscribers, so the tax on them would be about \$700 to \$800 per year.

There might be a way of raising the money that would not cause too much of an outcry, perhaps by distributing the tax burden evenly. All that is needed is a tax of \$80 on every man, woman and child in Canada. There would, of course, be many highly paid, and presumably happy, creative people, but, even if the money could be raised easily, what would the average Canadian receive for his or her money? The answer is a duplicate of an American network.

Table 2 gives examples of what the American networks receive for their money. The television shows in the table were not selected at random. They are eight of the ten most popular shows, based on BBM figures, seen on Canadian networks in the middle of March 1985. (The two shows from the top ten not included in the table - People's Choice Awards and Walt Disney - were also American, but the information on their cost was not available.)

Table 2

Estimated Production Costs of American Television Shows (Per Episode)

Show	Time (minutes)	Cost(US\$)	Cost(Can.\$)
Dallas	60	900,000	1,231,650
Magnum, P.I.	60	750,000	1,026,375
Knight Rider	60	750,000	1,026,375
Riptide	60	700,000	957,950
Kate and Allie	30	325,000	444,763
Newhart	30	375,000	513,188
Highway to Heaven	60	700,000	957,950
Scarecrow and Mrs. King	60	700,000	957,950

Source: Variety, September 26, 1984. The exchange rate for noon, June 4, 1985 (1.3685) was used to convert the costs given by Variety to their Canadian dollar equivalent.

To think that a Canadian network set up and funded to compete with the major American networks can opt for lower cost programming and still compete for viewers is a delusion. Mark Starowicz points out that Seeing Things costs about \$500,000 per episode to produce,⁽¹⁾ cheap by American production costs - about half the cost of Magnum, P.I., in fact. How do the shows compare in attracting audiences? Seeing Things attracts about one and a quarter million Canadians; Magnum, P.I. attracted an average of just under two and a half million Canadians in 1983-84.⁽²⁾ Some might argue that the comparison is unfair - Magnum, P.I., after all, is an extremely popular show. Unfortunately, that is exactly the type of competition that Canadian shows would face.

Some heavily-advertised CBC specials do better. Chautauqua Girl, for example, was watched by two point six million Canadians, slightly less than the average number of viewers for Dallas. (As a benchmark for specials, the final episode of M.A.S.H. was watched by seven point eight million Canadians.) Although Starowicz points with pride to the performance of Chautauqua Girl, he does not give an estimate of its cost. In general, there is a relation between the cost of a program and its perceived quality.⁽³⁾ If an expanded Canadian network is to compete with the American networks, it will have to spend large amounts of money on shows with mass appeal, shows that may be no different from the alternatives on American television.

(1) Starowicz (1984), p. 24.

(2) ACB, Airwaves. A.C. Neilsen ratings.

(3) Peter Lyman, Canada's Video Revolution: Pay TV, Home Video and Beyond, Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, Publishers, 1983, p. 54. FCC Special Staff, New Television Networks: Entry, Jurisdiction, Ownership and Regulation, Vol. 2 (Background Reports), Washington, D.C.: FCC, October 1980, p. 527.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that platitudes (such as "Canadian culture is good for Canadians") do not provide a sound basis for Canadian television policy. American television succeeds in Canada because it is satisfactory as mass entertainment - and is perceived as such by Canadian viewers - and because it is less expensive than any alternative. Because of geography and technological advances such as cable and satellite retransmission of broadcast signals, Canadian television viewing includes a large portion of American shows. With further technological advances, the rest of the world will watch more American television. This does not mean that national identities will be rapidly destroyed around the globe. Works of art last and shape national identities; television shows popular today are forgotten tomorrow and replaced by new television shows.

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